

Why the Tapes Are Needed

The White House wants to limit what Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski gets in the way of tapes and documents relating to numerous allegations of impropriety and criminality. The limit was set with Mr. Jaworski's predecessor, Archibald Cox, at nine tapes; with Mr. Jaworski it appears to be set at 17. That, the President implies, is all the prosecutor needs. Is it? Last November Mr. Cox reminded us that his subpoena for the original nine tapes was drawn up as a test. He did not expect to find within those conversations proof of anyone's guilt or innocence. At that time Cox and his staff had been at work only six weeks and had "received very little evidence from the White House files and the hope of getting more, seemed vain until legal principles had been established." The Watergate prosecution force has now been at work for over eight months, and whether nine, 17 or 100 tapes are needed to complete its task "with care and with thoroughness" (Mr. Jaworski's words), it should get them. Here are examples of why that is so.

First, there are the *three June 23, 1972 conversations between Mr. Nixon and H. R. Haldeman*. At 1:30 pm that afternoon Haldeman met in the White House with CIA Director Richard Helms and his deputy, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters. According to both CIA officials, Haldeman ordered Walters to tell Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III to stop his agents' investigation of four Mexican checks that had been cashed by one of the Watergate burglars. Walters was told by Haldeman to say that such an inquiry might compromise secret CIA operations. As later investigation proved, the Mexican checks were contributions to the President's reelection committee, not related in any way to the CIA. But Haldeman's intervention delayed for two weeks discovery of the financial tie between the Watergate break-in and the campaign committee. Might the tapes tell us why Haldeman sent Walters to Gray in the first place? Testifying before the Ervin committee, Haldeman said the President on the morning of June 23 had given "instructions... to hold the meeting" with Helms and Walters. The President admitted as much in his own statement of May 22, 1973. Haldeman could not recall, however, whether he had mentioned Mexico during the meeting, though each of the other participants remembered that it was. Nor could Haldeman remember whether Mr. Nixon had mentioned Mexico. It's a key point, for at